

FROM THE DESK OF DAVID STRINGER

January 23, 2019

Dear Colleagues,

I know that some of you have already spoken with me about media reports accusing me of being a racist, etc. Much has been made about four words, reported without context, in an effort to make it look like David Stringer says “blacks don’t blend in” and therefore is a racist. The fact that I was making a larger point about the American melting pot, a point many others have made before me, is left out of the story.

I find myself in an odd position where after spending a long career as an attorney (I’m 71 years old) fighting for the rights and protections of all Americans, regardless of race, gender, or ethnicity, I’m suddenly being told by strangers with absolute certainty that I am a racist.

Before concluding anything, I would ask you to consider some actual facts about me, and then accept an invitation....

As part of a conversation about challenges we face as a society, and the different challenges that different Americans face based on their ethnicity, I made the point that not every immigrant faces the same challenges. I hold this opinion based on conversations with people I have known, friends and clients of various backgrounds, who have shared their life experiences. Part of the challenge of being an African American, as related to me by friends and clients, is that they often feel like they are subjected to unwelcome attention by virtue of their race. Driving While Black and racial profiling are very real challenges they have to deal with and explain to their kids as they get older. And their sense of being non-native, like a guest, or visitor, is a common refrain for both those living in majority white communities and majority black communities.

My off the cuff remarks to a few ASU students who followed me into an elevator were an attempt to capture those sentiments, and I readily confess that I wasn’t choosing my words carefully in anticipation that they would be selectively excerpted, then trumpeted to the world for a specific and damaging purpose. For anyone who wants to read the full transcript of my remarks you will note portions where one of the students kept trying to put ugly words in my mouth, and I had to keep pointing out that I was not saying what he was saying. I regret not recognizing the trap and simply walking away, but I thought I was having a conversation with a group of students who were genuinely concerned about matters of race, where we were headed as a country, and how to overcome the challenges we face.

My viewpoint is informed by my work on behalf of various minority communities. My entire career before I entered politics has been as an attorney, protecting and defending the constitutional rights of my clients without regard to race, creed or color. For twenty-five years I was a trial attorney in Washington DC, where the majority of my clients were racial minorities. I also accepted appointments from the court to serve as Guardian ad litem for wards of the state. Over the years I devoted countless hours of pro bono legal work to my clients, many of them minorities.

This work has continued in retirement. In 2017, I represented an African-American woman who was the target of racial harassment in Prescott, Arizona. It was a small case that my client had tried pro se in the City Court of Prescott. The accuser had filed numerous complaints against her and claimed she had a dog that was a public nuisance. He repeatedly filed police reports and claimed to be a victim of her and her dog, and when she was found guilty, she turned to me for help. She was a retired school teacher living on a modest pension. I accepted the case pro bono. I investigated the complainant and discovered that he had a history of racial animosity and had harassed other minority neighbors in the past in another community. When I exposed this in court, I got my client's conviction vacated and the case dismissed. Ordinarily I wouldn't bother mentioning the story because I did it to help her, not for attention. Yet there are now scores of people claiming I am a racist who know nothing about me, the life I've lived, or the people I have helped and continue to help.

I've also been a long time and committed fighter in the cause of Criminal Justice Reform. Even the most stubborn accuser will note that Criminal Justice Reform is hardly the personal cause of a racist, yet again, my work and history is ignored so that the accusations can have center stage.

I mentioned an invitation to you and I'd like to make that now. If what you've read about me has made you mad, or you have questions about any of it, I invite you to reach out and let's have a conversation. I want to hear directly from you and I want you to hear directly from me, without a media filter making a mess of things.

I'm appreciative of those of you who have already spent time speaking with me, but a great many of you have not yet done so. I'd like to fix that.

We all know people who say everything right, but whose deeds are lacking and whose hearts are closed by real bigotry. They are the real problem when we talk about these issues. It would be wrong to judge anyone based on selective reporting of words taken out of context. I would not judge you that way. I ask that you spend a few minutes learning about me. I think you'll find we have much in common when it comes to fighting to make Arizona and America the best it can be for EVERYONE.

Thank you for your consideration.

David Stringer

P.S. I'm attaching an op-ed I wrote that appeared in Prescott eNews in celebration of our MLK holiday. I hope you'll read it and let me know your thoughts.